

## A Trip to the Northern River-Scrubs of N.S.W.

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When camped out in 1919 with the R.A.O.U. members at the Bunya Mts., Queensland, it was decided by a few of us that, all being well, we should pay a visit to the big scrubs of the Dorrigo district in the following spring. The party was to consist of Messrs. F. Morse, R. Hays, A. S. Le Souef, N. Cayley and the writer. Unfortunately, Messrs. Le Souef and Cayley were unable to attend, but others were induced to make the trip in their place. These were Messrs. A. Mawhinney, J. Bradley and W. Purkiss.

The plan was that the writer was to go to "Coocalla," Garah, the home of Mr. F. Morse, at the end of September, and after a fortnight's enjoyment of the hospitality of his host and hostess and the great pleasure and excitement of investigating the bird-life of the plains and swamps, including a camp-out by four of us at the Gwydir River, "Watercourse" (a list of the birds found here was recorded in *The Emu*, vol. xxi., part 1), a start was to be made east towards the coast and the Dorrigo Scrubs.

At the end of the second week in October, Messrs. Morse, Hays and myself, in the former's car, said good-bye to Coocalla, and, laden with camp gear of nearly every description, made a start for "The Prairie," the home of Mr. Mawhinney, where we were to pick him up, and also our cook, Jim, the latter a very necessary addition, as all who have put in a hard day in the big scrubs will admit. To arrive "home" tired out and have to set to and prepare and eat (the least troublesome), and wash up a meal means a tedious ending.

Before leaving Coocalla there was much map-reading o' nights, and as there had just been recorded 5 inches of rain at Dorrigo great disappointment was in our hearts. Anyone who knows the Dorrigo roads, with their steep descents and equally stiff climbs, and the "hairpin" turns and bends, will realise that the risk to life is very great if rain in any quantity has fallen. Five inches! We were indeed depressed. In addition, rain on the black soil plains of North Western N.S.W. means an absolute certainty of being bogged up to the axles, and staying where it happened, until the sun hardened things up, for no horses could pull us out if any were to be obtained readily. However, the rain did not reach very far west of the great tableland which divides the waters of the coastal rivers from those of the Western plains, and so we were enabled, going *via* Garah, to reach "The Prairie" without mishap.

A hearty welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Mawhinney awaited us, and over tea such wonderful stories were related of the bird-life of "The Prairie" and some neighbouring belts of belah and other

timber, that we decided to put in a day there and see for ourselves the mysterious "Cracking Thrush," as it was locally called. Here the Painted Honeyeater was to be obtained; here too, was a Whistler that needed inspecting, as he was very far north; here the Crimson-Wing Parrot was nesting, and Bell-Birds tolled their limpid notes.

Accordingly, a very enjoyable time was spent at "The Prairie," but as the object of this article is an account of the scrub birds, it must suffice to say that the Cracking Thrush is still *sub judice*, and that it seems to be a connecting link between *Colluricincla harmonica* and *C. brunnea*. It must be noted that we were close to the Queensland border.

More is intended to be recorded about this bird at another time, and one must leave the birds of this region to Mr. Mawhinney to record for readers of *The Emu* later. The various belts of timber and stunted scrubs were, however, very distinctive, each carrying its peculiar bird-life.

Mr. Mawhinney's car was called into requisition, and laden with tents, tucker, the cook's gear, and the cook, who was rescued from the arms of Bacchus and kept at "The Prairie" during "convalescence"! Away the two cars started on their long trail over the tableland, and steep descent to the lower levels on the other side. An interesting journey followed from "The Prairie," by way of roads and tracks across huge paddocks, and then on *via* Delungra (which we only just managed to reach ere the rain had made the roads too boggy), to Inverell, where we stayed for the night.

Much amusement was caused to the party at the former place, where we pulled up for benzine for the engines, when the writer was mistaken for a shearer just "cut out" from his last shed. On to Armidale next day, where we added Messrs. Purkiss and Bradley, in another car, to our party. Here the writer was mistaken by Mr. Bradley for a clergyman. After the shearer episode, the writer did not know whether to feel flattered or otherwise.

An early start was made from Armidale, and in view of the very disconcerting weather reports, after much consultation it was decided, on the advice of Mr. Purkiss, who was born in the Dorrigo district, to make for the Five Day Creek, Comara. Breakfast was eaten about twenty-five miles out from Armidale, at the Four Mile Creek, a most picturesque spot.

A ramble enabled us to list 31 species of birds here, many of them with nests or with young flying. A few feet from our fire was a nest of the Wattle-Bird about three feet from the ground. It contained two eggs, and the bird had used pieces of rag and twine for nesting material. The birds seen were the commoner varieties found in Victoria and New South Wales, and need not be enumerated.

From here we journeyed on, up hill and down, till we reached the banks of the Macleay River, and followed its winding course

amongst the hills, along roads very well made and maintained, but with thrilling, narrow, hairpin bends cut out of the mountain side, with the beautiful gleaming and swiftly flowing Macleay down at the foot. With a constant dropping to the lower levels, we came at last to the river, passing on our right a reservation for aborigines on a flat bordering the river. On past Blackbird school, an ideal place for Satin Bower-Birds, which fact leads one to assume that the name doubtless was taken because these birds were evidently pientiful in the locality, "black" in this case meaning dark blue.

Towards the end of the afternoon we reached Comara Store and P.O., and soon our guide, Mr. Purkiss, had decided where we should camp on the Five Day Creek, a swiftly flowing, large-sized creek, a tributary of the Macleay. On our left rose steep hills, in the general tree-top colour of which could be seen darker and denser areas denoting big scrubs—i.e., those in which figs and vines and all the sub-tropical growths occur, places beloved of Pigeons of several species, Pittas, Log-runners, and perhaps even the shy Scrub-Birds (*Atrichornis*), and who knew what bird treasures!

Soon ridge, and other tent poles were cut, and the tents erected on a shady, grassy flat, close to a small feeder of the Five Day Creek, from the opposite side of which towered a steep, scrub-covered mountain, which we hoped to investigate in due course. For the moment we could hear the calls of many birds, one of the first we noted being that of the little Crimson ("Blood") Honeyeater. As we ate our evening meal, the queer, monotonous notes of the Wonga-Wonga and the Brown Pigeon could be heard, and an inquisitive Coachwhip-Bird was making himself heard in a tangle of wild raspberries and scrub close by.

Up early next day, the party split up and tackled the surrounding hills from various gully ends, and soon all found that we had happened on one of the most tiring and dangerous rocky ascents in tangled scrub—a queer combination—we could possibly have selected. It was as though there had been a giant mine-shaft at the summit and all the huge slaty rubbish had been dumped down the hillsides into the gullies at the bottom. Of birds there was such a scarcity that it almost suggested bird extinction, except that hundreds of feet up in the leaves of the fig trees a pigeon or some other fruit-eater would at intervals drop a purple fruit as it fed.

Those ahead of one would slip on the shifting stones, which would come crashing down, a danger to those on the lower levels, and one was constantly slipping and falling and hurting one's ankles, etc. Also the heat was stifling, and there was not a breeze to cool one or drive away the sand-flies and mosquitoes. Tired, cross, and disappointed, all by degrees returned to camp, thoroughly disgusted with our non-success, and somewhat doubtful of our guide's knowledge of this bit of scrub at least. However, we were determined to give the place a good "try-out,"

and hoped for better luck around the river flats, where the paper-bark (*Melaleuca*) was in bloom. Here we found the Blood Honeyeater, together with the White-eared Honeyeater, the Yellow-faced Honeyeater, and the Yellow-eared Honeyeater. One Flinders Cuckoo was seen, and what at first caused a lot of speculation as to species, the Black Bittern.

Plenty of White-eyes (*Zosterops*), an occasional pair of Crested Shrike-tits, Blue Mountain Lorikeets, Australian Orioles. The quaint "four-line" call of the shy Black-faced Fly-catcher, produced almost like four short questions, was heard, and the birds seen. Rosellas, King Parrots, and Crimson Parrots were about, looking for a handy place to drink, thus confuting the theory popular amongst some, that Parrots do not require water. In some scrub at the camp the fluty notes of the Collared Butcher-Bird rang out, whilst Ravens were heard and seen overhead. Tree-Creepers, both the Brown and White-throated, were seen. Only one species of the Hawk was noted, the Brown Hawk. Satin Bower-Birds were fairly numerous, and although keen search was made, and many a sapling climbed, no recent nests were found. Indeed from an oologist's point of view the whole place was disappointing, and considering the long way we had come from North Western N.S.W. almost to the coast, we felt it more than we otherwise should.

When evening fell we went off to the river, after tea, to try for perch and eels to be had there, but not being properly equipped the result was not any better than our luck with the birds. There were plenty of fish to be had, and next day on again trying with natural flies we caught some beautiful silvery herrings, which on cooking revealed more bones than we thought a fish capable of possessing.

We decided to pull out of Comara, and going back on our tracks again, turning at an angle, on the Armidale-Grafton road, we made for what is known as Billy's Creek, a part of the big scrub once visited by Mr. Syd Jackson many years ago. It was a long trek, and the latter end of the journey was finished in the dark. The last hundred yards nearly provided an accident. Our cars had to ford a creek and run up a stump-studded bank opposite. One of the cars, in trying not to collide with the one in front, began to run backwards down to the creek, and only a bit of luck and much hanging on by four of us prevented a disaster. However, no damage was done, and soon the cars were parked. "Jim" had a cheerful blaze a-going, tents were soon erected, and after a good hot meal, a tired party of "bird maniacs," as we were called, soon turned in to sleep soundly.

Next morning saw us early astir, and we set off after breakfast to explore the big scrub beside which our camp was pitched, in a clearing at the foot of which ran a splendid stream of mountain water. This water is said to be the purest water possible. Giant trees of many kinds with a majority of coachwood—not very good fuel wood our cook complained—and a fairly dense

undergrowth was encountered, and in one of the gullies, all of which ran to the main creek (Billy's Creek), we found Lyre-Birds' nests, and lying at the foot of one a fine male bird, dead, and close by a young one. The cause of their deaths seemed mysterious, and we wondered if poison laid for rabbits by the settlers had been the cause.

Our ears were ever on the *qui vive* for the Scrub Bird (*Atrichornis*), and although in all our quests we were not fortunate enough to find a specimen, yet later on, thinking over things and comparing notes, we came to the conclusion, in view of what we learned, that we had heard the call, but failed to associate it with the bird. It must be remembered that it was in this locality, years before, Mr. Syd. Jackson had located the birds.

Soon we had found a Log-runner's nest, empty, and everywhere the quaint call of the Small Southern Warbler (*Gerygone fusca*) was heard, and numerous examples of the pretty hanging nests were found. High up among the top branches of giant trees we found the Crested Hawk, a good specimen of which was secured before it was identified. The days spent there were full of interest, but always the chief object of our outings—the *Atrichornis*—was not recorded.

However, we were introduced for the first time to the Large-headed Shrike-Robin, and much excitement was evinced about it until we had finally "placed" the species, the writer spending many hours in closely observing the habits of this dweller of the quietest glades, and in securing photos of the bird on the nest, but about this it is intended to write later in detail.

Night brought its Boobooks and another Owl with a weird call, which species it was we were unable to determine. Cat-Birds "meowed" and Bell-Magpies (*Strepera*) called unceasingly from the tree-tops; Lyre-Birds gave us imitations, and Dollar-Birds chattered in the dead timber around our camp in the twilight; altogether over 70 species of birds were listed.

Our last day at this camp was occupied by an excursion in the cars to a splendid creek known as Cloud's Creek, where we were to "park" the cars near the site of an old saw mill, and from which we were to follow a certain track into the hills into another "big scrub."

The drive down to this creek was very fine, as very frequently the road was simply an avenue with huge vine-covered trees hundreds of feet high on either side. However, after leaving the cars in a beautiful, clear space covered with very green grass, we somehow missed the right track, and after a long and hot walk had to return to camp. The clear space referred to was an ideal place for a camp, and we found that at different places in the big scrub these spaces existed and caused a lot of surprise to the party owing to the fact that they had not been cleared by artificial means, but were natural open spaces.

There were the usual species of birds to be seen and heard, and we were much interested in Tree-runners (sp.?) in the top-



most branches of the tall trees. The call note was unfamiliar, and we consequently tried to secure a specimen, but the best shots of the party failed to secure one owing to the great height. Here we saw the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, mostly in threes, two adults and a young one. We thought this would be a good spot for the 1921 R.A.O.U. camp, but we decided it would be difficult of access.

We returned to Billy's Creek, and next day left there, returning on our tracks along the head waters of the Nymboidea River (where we sighted a Koel and a Black-breasted Buzzard) for Dorriggo, a very long journey, necessitating some terrific hill-climbing, from the tops of which we had magnificent views of miles of forest stretching away to the Pacific Ocean. Passing through North Dorriggo, we came to Dorriggo township, and were now in the middle of the "cow country," thousands of acres of which a few years back were covered with dense vine scrub.

Having laid in a fresh stock of provisions, we went on a few miles and made camp on some private property close to the long descent of winding road which leads down to the coast on the Bellingen River, which could be seen in the cleared river flats miles away, winding among the farms to the Bellingen Heads. Soon we saw and heard the beautiful Rifle-Birds of Paradise. Again we heard the call of the Wonga-Wonga, and the red Pigeon, and here too the familiar Cat-Bird call and the Satin Bower-Birds. Flock Pigeons were sighted, but in small numbers only. Swainson's Purple-crowned Pigeons were numerous, as also were the Green-winged Pigeons.

Almost immediately we were at work reconnoitring our new surroundings with the eagerness of schoolboys, and some of us crossing the road, which was hewn out of the hill-side, essayed a descent to the deep gully below. This proved a most hazardous, if not dangerous, feat owing to the tangled growth and loose stones and precipitous slope, and the thick tree tops hundreds of feet above our heads almost shutting out the light.

A scramble up through dense wild raspberry vines and *Lantana* brought us hot, tired, and dusty on to the road again, and all we had learnt was that in these dense, dark gullies bird life is scarce, whereas the birds we expected to find were away up in the sunlit treetops, with the exception of some few ground dwellers, such as the Scrub Turkey, Log-runners, and the Spotted Ground-Bird.

For days we worked the dense scrubs and gullies and climbed trees without number after Cat-Birds and Satin Bower-Birds, but mostly we looked out for Scrub-Birds and Rifle-Birds. We were constantly finding nests of Cat-Birds and Bower-Birds, which were neither old nor new—that is, they presented the appearance of being recently inhabited. The same with the Log-runners, and one of our party, though not an ornithologist, soon became so specialised in finding the nests of these birds that it became almost uncanny. All or nearly all the birds seemed to us to have nested and hatched out their broods, and yet this was

only early in October. The writer is of the opinion that following the break-up of the long drought, the birds at once started breeding, and threw the nesting season out of step. In no other way could we account for the finding of so many recently-used nests.

From an oological point of view our excursion was a partial failure, but when we considered all the birds we had seen and heard, and whose habits we had observed, we felt the outing was not in vain. For instance, one could never forget seeing the Log-runners a few feet away from us rooting up the ground like a domestic fowl scratching on a manure heap, all the while emitting most musical notes. One can see the fighting and chasing of enemy species and hear the exultant notes of the victors; cheeky Honey-eaters and rival bush whistlers bursting into defiant song before the eyes of a demure female; the piercing calls of the Tree-Creepers, and the early morning call of the Wonga-Wongas, and at night the eerie screech of the unknown Owl.

Rain, the best gift to the man on the land, was responsible for a change in our plans, and for some interference with our outings, but the lack of this same gift has been also the means of somewhat spoiling the result of the R.A.O.U. Camp in Queensland the previous year, and we consoled ourselves with the fact that the rain was better for the preservation of our birds than lack of it.

All the same, quite reluctantly we struck camp, and made our long run to Armidale, which we reached in a perfect torrent of rain, and here our party broke up, with expressions of regret and a decision to meet again, if spared, for another outing in the future.

The following birds were listed during the expedition:—

Brush-Turkey (*Alectura lathamii*); Purple-crowned Pigeon (*Ptilinopus superbus*); Topknot-Pigeon (*Lopholaimus antarcticus*); Pheasant-Pigeon (*Macropygia phasianella*); Peaceful Dove (*Geopelia placida*); Green Winged Pigeon (*Chalcophaps chrysochloris*); Wonga (*Leucosarcia melanoleuca*); Mangrove Bittern (*Butorides stagnatilis*); Grey Goshawk (*Astur novæ-hollandiæ*); Australian Goshawk (*Astur fasciatus*); Black-breasted Buzzard (*Gypoictinia melanosterna*); Crested Hawk (*Baza subcristata*); Brown Hawk (*Ieracidea berigora*); Nankeen Kestrel (*Cerchneis cenchroides*); Boobook Owl (*Ninox boobook*); Owl (Sp.); Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*); Blue Mountain Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus moluccannus*); Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*); King Parrot (*Aprosmictus scapularis*); Crimson Rosella (*Platycercus elegans*); Rosella (*P. eximius*); Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*); Australian Roller (*Eurystomus orientalis*); Azure Kingfisher (*Alcyon azurea*); Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*); Fantailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*); Square-tailed Cuckoo (*C. pyrrhophanus*); Narrow-billed Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalis*); Broad-billed Bronze-Cuckoo (*Lamprocygus lucidus*); Koel (*Eudynamys orientalis*); Lyre-Bird (*Menura novæ-hollandiæ*); Noisy Pitta (*Pitta versicolor*); Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*); Fairy Martin (*Hylochelidon ariel*); Jacky Winter (*Microeca fascians*); Flame-breasted Robin (*Petroica phænica*); Rose-breasted Robin (*Erythrodryas rosea*); Hooded Robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*); Southern Bush-Warbler (*Gerygone fusca*); Large-headed Shrike-Robin (*Poecilodryas capito*); Yellow-breasted Shrike-Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*); Shrike-Tit (*Falcunculus frontatus*); Rufous-breasted Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*); Golden-breasted Whistler (*P. pectoralis*); Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*);

Rufous Fantail (*R. rufifrons*); Spine-tailed Log-runner (*Orthonyx temminckii*); Black-faced Flycatcher (*Monarcha melanopsis*); Leaden Flycatcher (*Myiagra rubecula*); Great Caterpillar-eater (*Edolisoma tenuirostris*); Cuckoo Shrike (*Graucalus novae-hollandiae*); Australian Ground-Thrush (*Oreocincla lunulata*); Whip-Bird (*Psophodes olivaceus*); Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*); Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*Geobasilus chrysorrhoa*); Spotted Ground-Bird (*Cinclosoma punctatum*); Yellow-throated Scrub-Wren (*Scricornis lathamii*); Scrub-Wren (*S. frontalis*); Large-billed Scrub-Wren (*S. magnirostris*); Blue-Wren Warbler (*Malurus cyaneus*); Variegated Wren-Warbler (*M. lamberti*); Wood-Swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*); Shrike-Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*); Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*); Orange-winged Tree-Runner (*Neositta chrysoptera*); Brown Tree-Creeper (*Climacteris picumna*); White-throated Tree-Creeper (*C. leucophaea*); White-eye (*Zosterops lateralis*); Mistletoe-Bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*); Pardalote (*Pardalotus striatus*); Spotted Pardalote (*P. punctatus*); Crimson Honey-eater (*Myzomela sanguinolenta*); Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*); Striped Honey-eater (*Plectorhyncha lanceolata*); White-eared Honey-eater (*Meliphaga leucotis*); Yellow-faced Honey-eater (*M. chrysops*); Yellow-eared Honey-eater (*M. lewini*); Wattle-Bird (*Acanthochara carunculata*); Australian Pipit (*Anthus australis*); Friar-Bird (*Philemon corniculatus*); Red-browed Finch (*Aegintha temporalis*); Australian Oriole (*Oriolus sagittatus*); Cat-Bird (*Ailuraedus crassirostris*); Satin-Bower Bird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*); Rifle-Bird (*Ptiloris paradisea*); Australian Raven (*Corvus Coronoides*); Currawong (*Strepera graculina*); Grey Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus torquatus*); Black-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*).

## The Orange-Winged Tree-Runner (*Neositta chrysoptera*)

By P. A. GILBERT, R.A.O.U., Lakemba, N.S.W.

For several years, in a certain locality, two pairs of Orange-winged Tree-runners have been under observation, bringing forth their successive broods. This place, which was once a secluded nook clothed with typical Australian brush, scrub, and trees, and frequented by numerous forms of bird life, is however, now shorn of its verdant beauty, to make way for the habitations of man, whose advance into Nature's solitudes is characterised by a cold disregard for all life, animal or vegetable, unless, perhaps, it adds to his wants and desires.

Notwithstanding this rather saddening concomitant of man's urban progress, an ineffaceable mental picture was obtained of a bird whose life history is made up of the inconceivably minute detail of Nature, the adequate portrayal of which baffles the art either of poet or painter. Recourse must be had, therefore, to a more pedestrian muse, in describing this bird and its habits, in such a way as to render intelligible the accompanying photographs.

The length of this bird is between four and five inches. The crown of the head is dark brown; while the rest of the dorsal feathering is more or less a duller brown, with darker streaks. The wings are dark brown with a rufous patch of a rich tone about the centre of the outspread wing, which shows up to ad-